

# WHY REST?

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshios Behar & Bechukosai

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**By Shlomo Katz**

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Today's Learning:

Nach: Tehilim 47-48

Mishnah: Ohalot 15:8-9

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ketubot 103

Halachah: Mishnah Berurah 586:5-7

Throughout this shemittah year, we have discussed the laws and concepts of the Sabbatical year. This week's parashah is the primary source for those laws and concepts. R' Moshe Zvi Neriah z"l (1913-1995; founder of the Bnei Akiva youth movement and network of yeshivot) writes: "It is no easy task for a farmer to take a vacation for an entire year. Nevertheless, this 'freedom' is not for nothing. After toiling on the earth for six straight years, a person is liable to blend in with the earth, which, after all, is whence he came before a soul was breathed into him. The purpose of the shemittah is to give the soul a chance to flourish."

R' Neriah adds that many earlier commentaries have advanced other reasons for the shemittah, all of them valid. He cites the following, among others:

R' Zvi Hirsch Kalischer z"l (Germany; 19th century) writes that shemittah ensures that every person will have time for Torah study. He also writes that shemittah lessens the gap between rich and poor, since it means that, for one year at least, anyone can enter any field to gather the crops.

Rambam z"l (Egypt; 12th century) writes that the shemittah is an expression of G-d's mercy to the poor.

The anonymous 13th century work Sefer Ha'chinuch writes that the purpose of shemittah is to teach the wealthy the trait of vatanut. [In general, this trait refers to not standing up for one's honor, money or other tangible or intangible possessions even when one is in the right. Here it refers to giving up the fruits of one's labor.] In addition, the Sefer Ha'chinuch states, the shemittah reminds us that we are not the true masters of the Land; rather, G-d is its Master. (Ner La'maor)

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"If your brother becomes impoverished and sells part of his ancestral heritage, his redeemer who is closest to him shall come and redeem his brother's sale." (25:25)

R' Menachem Mendel Hager z"l (1886-1941; rabbi, rosh yeshiva and chassidic rebbe in Oyber Visheve, Hungary) writes: This verse can be understood in light of Arizal's explanation of the words of shemoneh esrei, "Place our lot with them [the righteous]." How can we pray for something that depends on our own free will? Rather, Arizal (R' Yitzchak Luria; 1534-1572) explains, when a person sins, the reward for his good deeds is taken from him and given to tzaddikim. However, the righteous do not want what is not theirs, and they voluntarily return this reward to its original owner. Thus we pray: If we have sinned and lost our reward, at least place our lot with the type of tzaddik who will return it to us.

R' Hager continues: Our verse can be understood similarly. "If your brother becomes impoverished"--referring to a person who is "impoverished" of good sense and therefore sins--"and sells part of his ancestral heritage"--he transfers what should have been his to someone else--"his redeemer"--a tzaddik--"who is closest to him shall come and redeem his brother's sale."

However, R' Hager notes, a person does not have to rely on the kindness of a tzaddik; he can earn

his reward back. Thus, the next verses says: "If a man has no redeemer, but his means suffice and he acquires enough for its redemption; then he shall reckon the years of his sale and return the remainder to the man to whom he had sold it; and he shall return to his ancestral heritage." Through teshuvah, a person's "means [can] suffice" to acquire back what once was rightfully his. The tzaddik himself will make arguments on the person's behalf, noting that his sins are the result of the long exile, i.e., "he shall reckon the years of his sale [into the hands of the gentile nations]." (Sheirit Menachem)

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"If you will walk in [the way of] My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them." (26:3)

Rashi z"l writes: One might think that the phrase "If you will walk in [the way of] My decrees" refers to fulfilling the commandments. However, when the Torah says, "and observe My commandments and perform them," it is clear that that refers to fulfilling the commandments. How then must we interpret: "If you will walk in [the way of] My decrees"? As an admonition that one should exert himself for Torah study.

R' Shmuel Halevi Wosner z"l (1913-2015; prominent posek living in Bnei Brak, Israel) writes about studying Torah with exertion ("ameilut"):

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 99b) teaches: Man was created to exert himself, as we read (Iyov 5:7), "Man is born for exertion." The Gemara continues: I don't know whether this refers to exertion through speech or through action; therefore it says (Mishlei 16:26), "He saddled his mouth." Still, I don't know whether it refers to speaking words of Torah or idle chatter; therefore it says (Yehoshua 1:8), "This Book of the Torah is not to leave your mouth. You shall contemplate it day and night." From this we can conclude that man was created to exert himself in Torah study. [Until here from the Gemara]

R' Wosner explains: Hashem placed us in a physical world, not in a spiritual world. Man could therefore look around at the world, analyze his tremendous potential, and conclude that he was created in order to go to work and invent goods and services that will serve the physical world. This is the viewpoint that the Gemara is proposing, and rejecting, when it suggests that man was created to exert himself through action. It is true that we read (Tehilim 128:2), "When you eat the labor of your hands, you are praiseworthy," but that is not the purpose for which man was created.

R' Wosner continues: How could the Gemara contemplate that man was created to engage in idle chatter? He explains: Of course the Gemara is not referring to actual idle chatter. Rather, a person's Torah study can be idle chatter as well if he does not exert himself and use his full potential. A person was not created for that kind of Torah study, but rather to exert himself. (Derashot V'sichot Shevet Ha'levi 5759 p.240)

"If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments . . ." (26:3)

Rashi writes that "If you will follow My decrees" refers to toiling in Torah study. If so, writes R' Akiva Yosef Schlesinger z"l (Hungary and Yerushalayim; died 1922), we can understand why this verse follows immediately after the verse, "My Sabbaths you shall observe." Specifically, the Midrash Tanna D'vei Eliyahu states that the primary time for Torah study is on Shabbat, when one is free from work. (Torat Yechiel)

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## Pirkei Avot

There are four types of people: (a) One who says, "Mine is mine and yours is yours," is an average character type, but some say that this is the trait of Sdom; (b) "Mine is yours and yours is mine," is an unlearned person; (c) "Mine is yours and yours is yours," is scrupulously pious; (d) "Yours is mine and mine is mine," is wicked. (Chapter 5)

R' Mendele Hager z"l (see above) explains: We read (Mishlei 3:6), "In all your ways, know Him." One should introduce holiness even into fulfilling his physical needs. We read further (Tehilim 119:57), "My portion, I said 'Hashem,' in order to fulfill Your words." About "my portion"--in all mundane matters--"I declared that it should be for Hashem."

In this light, our mishnah may be read as follows: If a person says, "Mine is mine and Yours is Yours," i.e., he keeps his physical and spiritual worlds separate, he is average. "But some say," i.e., there are people who say their spiritual world is spiritual, but it is all talk; they are like the people of Sdom. In contrast, one whose life is based on the principle, "Mine is Yours and Yours is Yours," is scrupulously pious. (Quoted in Yalkut Avhan Ela'in)

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## Shemittah

This week we present excerpts from a letter written by a contemporary posek / halachic authority, R' Asher Weiss shlita to a recipient in Los Angeles, California. It is printed in Minchat Asher: Shevi'it p.177.

You have asked my opinion of an announcement that was made in your community that one can buy a tree or a parcel of land in Eretz Yisrael and let it rest during the seventh year, thus being counted among those who observe the mitzvah of shemittah.

Truthfully, I do not approve of this. Even if we would assume that one fulfills a mitzvah in this way, we have no precedent suggesting that it is even an act of chassidut / extra piety to place oneself in a situation where one will fulfill a passive mitzvah ("sheiv v'al ta'aseh"). If you want to do that, why not

buy a farm animal in order to let it rest on Shabbat? [Just as we never heard of someone buying a farm animal for that purpose, so there is no reason to buy land in order to let it rest during the shemittah.]

It is true that the Minchat Chinuch and Chazon Ish hold that one who has no chametz to burn on Erev Pesach should buy some. The Chazon Ish even calls it an act of chassidut. However, even if we adopt that view, that case is different because burning chametz is an active mitzvah ("kum v'asei").

In any event, even if it is a mitzvah to own land and let it rest during the shemittah, our Sages have taught that Hashem values mitzvot in proportion to the effort put in to them. Nowadays, everyone runs after easy mitzvot and forgets that man's perfection and his attachment to Hashem come from exerting oneself in His service and withstanding life's tests. Farmers who let their land rest during the shemittah year are heroes who do His will. They deserve our support! . . .

I have stepped out of my comfort zone to write this because there are wealthy benefactors who used to support shemittah observers, but who now think that they are performing a greater mitzvah by investing in land themselves.

I know that many will wonder: What could be wrong with adopting a stringency [i.e., buying land just in case it is a mitzvah]? Such is not the Torah way! Just as we should not invent new leniencies, so we should not invent new stringencies that our predecessors never imagined.

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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